# Shaping Language Teacher Identities

## Pathways to Professional Growth

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# Chapter 7
# The Role of the English Literature Teacher as a Cultural Facilitator in Turkish Classrooms

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## ABSTRACT

*This chapter focuses on the various roles of an English Literature teacher as a cultural mediator in a Turkish context. Teaching a foreign language is about helping learners gain intercultural empathy and transform their worldviews (Murat Hişmanoğlu, 2005; Büşra Onursoy & Senem Zaimoğlu, 2024). Teachers act as cultural brokers, helping learners to grasp the cultural context of a given text and, at the same time, fostering the acceptance of other values and perspectives (Servet Çelik & Şakire Erbay Çetinkaya, 2020). In such mediation, the teaching of literature is not confined to grammar and vocabulary, and the literature class is also a site of cultural exchange. Foreign language teachers are expected to adapt teaching and learning resources, elaborate on foreign cultural elements, and manage interactions that link the English literary canon with the Turkish sociocultural context (İlkin Başar & Selin Küçükali, 2021; Gülten Torlak, 2024).*

## INTRODUCTION

Teachers of English used to focus on learners' development of grammatical, lexical, and pragmatic competencies (i.e., the mastery of language form, meaning,

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and use). Now, teachers also attend to the learner's capacity to engage with cultural differences in reflective, ethical, and socially responsible ways. Recent literature continues to refer to this broader educational aim as intercultural communicative competence (ICC). ICC is the ability to interpret, relate, and negotiate meaning across different cultural contexts, all the while remaining aware of one's own cultural context (Byram, 2021, pp. 20–23; Deardorff, 2020, pp. 67–69). In this regard, the teacher's role is even more than that of a cultural broker; that is, teachers are not simply language teachers but also bridge builders of meaning among texts, learners, and sociocultural contexts. Most of the time, literature is considered secondary in the teaching of English as a Foreign Language. The teaching of English in Turkiye, as in many other countries, is based on developing functional communication skills. This teaching culture limits the use of literature for cultural instruction.

Most applied linguists argue that literature can be an effective means of teaching culture. When reading comprehension is taught through literature, students encounter perspectives on power, identity, and values. In other words, literature embodies the complexity of a culture, is often multivocal, and, in many cases, contains meanings that can be contested, thereby enriching students' multiple and intercultural ethics. Literature, however, has considerable potential as a means of intercultural communication and of teaching multiple perspectives and ethics; however, the student literature curriculum has been limited. Literature in the classroom is often regarded as simply an adjunct to vocabulary instruction. In an EFL context, literature is rarely viewed as a cultural artifact. In addition to a surface examination of the literary text to incorporate multiple perspectives, the curricular practice of EFL emphasizes examining the text in functional terms. In classrooms, literature is often treated as a means of teaching vocabulary or reading comprehension, rather than as an ideological artifact. In this respect, English literature instructors in Turkiye must engage in ongoing cultural balancing acts. These balancing acts can include altering texts, providing cultural context, and negotiating English literary traditions alongside local literary cultures (Başar & Küçükali, 2021, pp. 203–205; Torlak, 2024, pp. 66–68). However, there is evidence that teachers in this context are not often ready for this kind of mediating, as the role of intercultural mediation is largely absent in both pre-service and in-service teacher training programs (Gedik Bal & Savaş, 2020, pp. 418–420; Gürbüz & Yıldırım, 2024, pp. 9–11). Cultural mediation is often left to individual teachers rather than to the institution as a whole.

Viewed through a theoretical lens, the cultural aspect of teaching literature can be understood through the lens of ICC. Building on Byram, we can examine intercultural competence as comprising curiosity, knowledge of social practices, interpretive relational skills, discovery, intercultural awareness, and cultural empathy. Drawing on Deardorff's work, it is clear that treating literature as cultural artefacts helps students make sense of these texts. Literature also addresses power, values,

and identity, fostering thoughtful discussions of their meanings. Conceptually, intercultural mediation is implemented at the level of individual classrooms, but the institutional and curricular contexts shape its extent and duration. The alignment of the curriculum, the assessment framework, and institutional goals tends to constrain how much teachers can genuinely pursue intercultural aims in a highly standardized education system, such as Turkiye's. For English literature teachers to function as cultural mediators, greater alignment among the national curriculum, the syllabus, assessment, and teacher education is required. This chapter focuses on English literature teachers in their capacities as cultural mediators across the textual, dialogic, and pedagogical dimensions, arguing that intercultural mediation entails not only changes in methods but also in the conception of the teacher, toward a more ethical, reflexive, and interculturally engaged teacher.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF TEACHER IDENTITY AND PROFESSIONAL GROWTH IN LANGUAGE TEACHING

The role of teacher identity has become crucial for understanding how teachers perform intercultural and pedagogical roles in their classrooms and how it functions within recent research in language education. The teacher's identity is not a static attribute; it is a dynamic, contextually tethered phenomenon shaped and reshaped through experience and reflection (Pishghadam et al., 2022). In this respect, teachers' professional identity must encompass more than the conventional language-mediating role; it must include the self as a mediator, interpreter, and intercultural facilitator.

Recent academic discourse elaborates on teacher identity as dynamic and nonlinear, perpetually negotiated within institutional, relational, and sociocultural frameworks. Xu (2025) characterizes teacher identity development as a continuum influenced by authority, agency, and vulnerability, underscoring that identity work necessitates both emotional investment and professional competence (p. 7). This point of view makes it clear that professional identity is built not only through what you know about teaching, but also through what you do, how you interact with others, and how you think about your work.

The journey towards becoming a cultural mediator is not merely the acquisition of new practices. It is an overhaul of one's professional self. The changing roles of teachers, more specifically of EFL teachers, from language instructors to intercultural educators, is a good illustration of this. In Phothongsunan's (2025, pp. 270–272) research on EFL teachers as intercultural educators, teachers facilitating intercultural communication and reflection were described as experiencing shifts in their professional and personal self-identities. More specifically, teachers described a transition from merely providing language and content to fostering empathy, cultural awareness,

and critical, reflective thought, and, in the process, redefined the term "teacher" in relation to increasingly heterogeneous classrooms. This change in identity often comes with significant emotional stress and role strain. It is not easy to negotiate a professional identity. The cultural mediator's job is especially hard because it requires emotional work, mental flexibility, and the ability to balance the needs of different institutions. Phothongsunan (2025) records substantial emotional difficulties encountered during the transition to the intercultural educator role, reflecting broader observations that identity development frequently entails conflict among curriculum requirements, accountability frameworks, and individual convictions.

Teacher identity research consistently indicates that professional identity is dynamic, influenced by experience, emotional involvement, and relational interactions with students, as well as by the overarching social frameworks within which educators function (Liu et al., 2023). Liu, Mearns, and Admiraal (2023) examined international language instructors in cross-cultural settings and discovered that intercultural teaching contexts fostered identity development through significant teacher-student relationships, while concurrently creating tensions related to unfamiliar social norms and expectations (p. 104379). These findings indicate that intercultural environments function as both catalysts for identity expansion and sources of professional vulnerability. This shift affects how teachers view themselves professionally. Teacher identity studies shed a little light on this. Most of the time, a person's professional identity is in flux due to experience, emotional involvement, and relational connections with students, as well as to social constructs within the environments in which they operate (Liu et al., 2023). In the study of international language instructors teaching in cross-cultural environments, the researchers noted the positive impact of intercultural environments and teacher-student relationships on identity development, while also suggesting the negative impact of these environments on the development of cross social relationships and the associated tension due to the teachers developing unfamiliar social norms, expectations, and dynamics (Liu, Mearns and Admiraal, 2023).

Professional development cannot be reduced to technical training; it must be understood as a practice that shapes identity. Banegas et al. (2023) assert that ongoing professional development sustains and augments teachers' agentic identities, especially when it incorporates classroom practice, research involvement, and collaborative inquiry (pp. 112–113). When teachers join reflective and dialogic professional learning communities, they begin to see themselves as more than just teachers; they also see themselves as leaders in education and producers of knowledge. Negotiating a professional identity is rarely straightforward. The role of the cultural mediator is the most problematic for teachers, as it entails a range of emotional, cognitive, and role-strain challenges. In Phothongsunan's (2025) mixed-methods study of EFL teachers, a significant degree of emotional challenges and

role strain is evident during the transition to the intercultural educator role. The challenges noted in this case study reflect those teachers face when attempting to build a professional identity. Teachers must weigh the expectations of their role against curriculum mandates, the institution's accountability structures, and their professional identity, which is in constant flux.

Research on professional autonomy indicates a significant correlation between teacher agency and identity consolidation. Dilek and Altas (2022) discovered that educators who recognize increased autonomy in pedagogical decision-making demonstrate more robust professional identities and enhanced resilience (p. 24). In this context, agency enhances teachers' ability to modify instruction, engage in intercultural interactions, and respond innovatively to classroom diversity.

The connection to the data explicitly aligns with professional identity development and role change. In teacher identity research, the role change and identity development link posits that as professional development fosters reflective practice, cultural responsiveness, and teacher agency, teachers become more resilient and adaptive. Increased self-identity, confidence, cultural responsiveness, and adaptive pedagogy are essential to the cultural mediator's (i.e., the teacher) role in a multicultural classroom. This illustrates the importance of developing professional learning opportunities that center on identity transformation.

Overall, the transformation of teacher identity required to enact cultural mediation in language teaching broadens the dimension of teacher identity from linguistic competence to the transdisciplinary layers of professional identity, encompassing intercultural responsiveness, critical reflexivity, and ethical stance. In this perspective, professional development is an identity-reforming process, grounded in the interplay of experience, reflection, and situated practice. The core of teacher education and professional development should aim to facilitate this identity transformation.

## THE ROLE OF THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHER AS A CULTURAL FACILITATOR

The growth of teacher identity toward being able to respond to different cultures changes how people think about the work of teaching language. If teachers see themselves not just as people who teach language but also as people who help people understand meaning across cultures, then the way they teach in the classroom needs to change, too. Language is not an independent system of grammar and vocabulary isolated from context; instead, it is integrated within social realities, value systems, histories, and power dynamics. As a result, language teachers' professional growth increasingly entails cultivating the ability to navigate learners through intricate processes of cultural interpretation, comparison, and reflection.

Modern communicative and intercultural frameworks have strengthened this change by saying that using language correctly requires more than just structural accuracy. Learners need to know how meanings are worked out in different social and cultural settings and how discourse shapes identities. Consequently, educators are tasked with enhancing students' understanding of how language mirrors and influences social norms, relationships, and expectations. Facilitating this requires an understanding of teaching, knowledge of other cultures, and the ability to think critically about cultural representations instead of just presenting them as unchanging or the same. Also, globalization, migration, and digital communication have made intercultural interactions more common in everyday life. Classrooms are becoming increasingly multilingual and multicultural, so teachers need to see diversity as a normal part of modern education, not as something that happens by chance. In this context, language instruction becomes inextricably linked to cultural exploration, moral positioning, and contemplative discourse. The role of the foreign language teacher goes beyond just teaching language forms; they also help students understand other cultures and improve their ability to communicate.

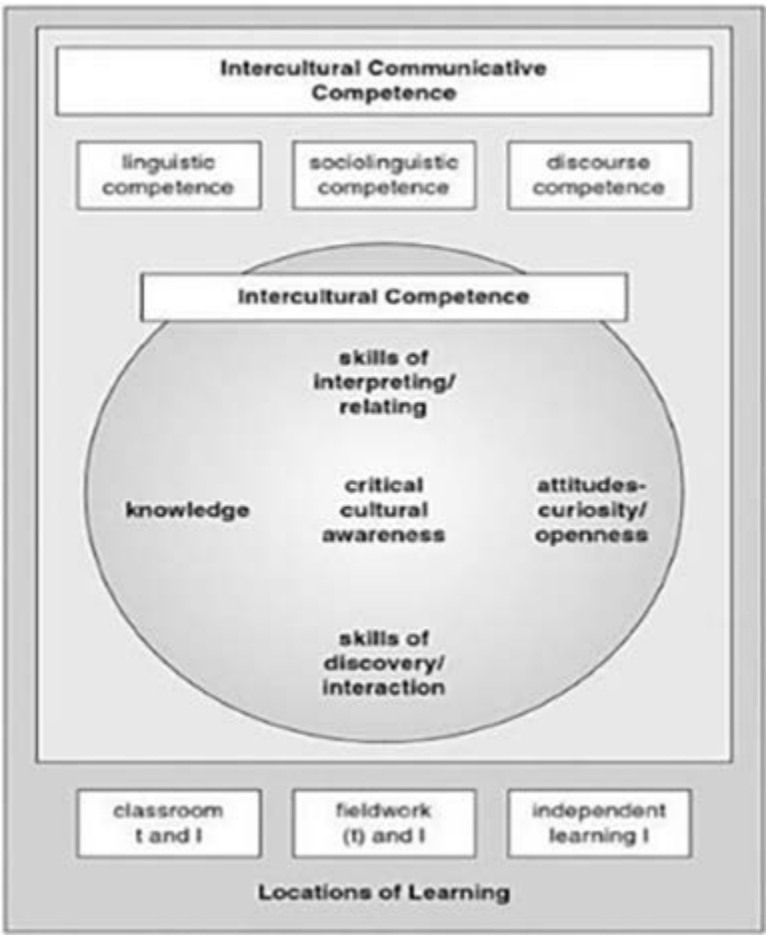
Traditionally, language teaching has emphasized structures, vocabulary, and the pronunciation of elements that are easily measured and tested. On the contrary, recent research and scholarship suggest that communication and language use are inextricably linked to culture and the social contexts in which they occur. Each instance of communication comes with expectations and social context. There are social expectations and context in how politeness is expressed, how disagreement is negotiated, how social roles are constructed, and even how humor is used. Furthermore, some topics are considered socially inappropriate to discuss in specific contexts. This means that the foreign language teacher must also be a culture teacher (Kramsch, 2022, pp. 41–44; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2023, pp. 17–19; Liddicoat, 2022) and help learners develop their understanding of the culturally embedded practices of meaning-making.

Contemporary intercultural pedagogy does not focus on the superficial aspects of culture, such as food, festivals, and historical monuments. Instead, it focuses on culture as a living, dynamic meaning-making system constructed through interaction and lived experience. Risager (2021, pp. 9–12) explains that culture is not a neutral repository of facts but a system of frameworks, structures, and contexts that are interpretive in nature and, in turn, shape how people construct their reality and how people relate to one another. This is how the cultural dimension of language teaching helps learners attend to the sociocultural contexts in which meanings are created, challenged, and negotiated in the target language and in their own cultures.

As cultural facilitators, language instructors help students move beyond the simplistic “us versus them” dichotomy, guiding them toward more sophisticated understandings of difference. This process involves cultivating curiosity, openness,

and the ability to suspend judgment—dispositions contemporary models associate with intercultural communicative competence (ICC) as an evolving and reflexive process (Byram, 2021, pp. 20–23; Deardorff, 2020, pp. 67–69). From a pedagogical standpoint, this involves selecting texts and tasks that foreground cultural complexity, facilitating dialogue on sensitive or controversial topics, and establishing classroom norms for respectfully considering diverse perspectives.

*Figure 1. Components of intercultural communicative competence and the teacher's role as a cultural mediator*




*Byram (2021).*

Byram (2021, p. 62) elaborates that intercultural competence comprises several components that enable people to interact with others from different cultures. According to Figure 1, Byram places attitudes such as curiosity and a willingness to

suspend judgment at the core of intercultural involvement. This model emphasizes the importance of genuine positive interest in learning about other cultures, rather than a negative interest in passing judgment. The model also states that attitudes surrounding the core are the intellectual nuts and bolts that guide social groups. These also involve the study of practices and cultural processes. This provides the learner with the tools to examine the context of elements beyond simple, surface-level social practices and processes.

The model also describes and highlights the importance of two other broad and interconnected areas: interpreting and relating, as well as what is termed discovery and interaction. These are the skills the learner is expected to possess to process cultural artifacts and practices, anchor, and adapt them to their own cultural constructs, and interact with the new culture in real time, all simultaneously. Critical cultural awareness is a positive aspect of these skills, as it enables learners to critique others' cultural practices with the goal of fairness, respect, and human rights.

In this context, the teacher can be seen as a central cultural mediator. Instead of passing on a definitive piece of cultural information, the teacher enables learners to traverse the various elements through the deconstruction of information, the construction of elements, and the promotion of dialogue. Intercultural competence, as illustrated in Figure 1, develops non-sequentially through the continual interplay of its components, with support from teaching. It is the teacher's role to help students manage ambiguity and, from a moral and discursive perspective, examine how they engage with the 'other' and their 'self' within a given culture, thereby enhancing the ethical and discursive dimensions of intercultural communicative competence.

Recent studies show that cultural facilitation involves more than the transfer of knowledge; it is about guiding learners' interpretations. Teachers assist students in recognizing cultural indicators, considering alternative interpretations, and connecting these to their own experiences and values (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2023, pp. 61–64). Notably, culture is diverse and multi-layered; it varies across regions, social classes, genders, age groups, and individual identities. Presenting culture as uniform can reinforce stereotypes and hinder the cultivation of intercultural competence (Risager, 2021, pp. 54–56). Consequently, teachers act as curators of perspectives, intentionally sourcing materials that reflect the subject's internal plurality.

The idea of a 'third space' has been revised but still maintains an important place in current theory. To Kramsch (2022), language education should help learners arrive at what she terms 'symbolic competence' or the ability to think critically about the processes of meaning creation in various social contexts (pp. 45 – 48). Educators guide learners in this endeavor through techniques of comparison and interpretation, as well as through reflexive dialogue. However, such facilitation is not neutral; the selection of specific texts, the preference for particular perspectives, and the legitimization of certain varieties of language are filled with ideology. As Risager

(2021) claims, language education is situated within the hierarchy of the world and, therefore, must be transnational, plural, and multilingual rather than limited to one nation's culture (pp. 73 – 75).

In addition to the aforementioned, cultural facilitation requires the ability to handle ambiguity and learners' emotional reactions. Intercultural learning almost always generates uncertainty, and some people feel uncomfortable or even defensive when their assumptions are challenged. Recent studies indicate the importance of educators in providing emotional and ethical support as learners encounter such situations, and, in this regard, consider misunderstandings not as failures but as opportunities for deeper learning (Deardorff, 2020, pp. 83–85). Educators also help learners consider multiple possibilities for interpretation, contextual elements, and varying degrees of communicative adaptability. In this way, educators also guide learners in developing interpretive flexibility and relational competence.

## THE USE OF ENGLISH LITERATURE AS A CULTURAL FACILITATOR

As language education increasingly prioritizes intercultural communicative competence, educators must seek pedagogical tools that foster deep cultural understanding rather than mere cultural awareness. Conventional cultural education often relied on the dissemination of factual information about traditions, celebrations, cuisine, or social norms. Although this knowledge can be helpful as a starting point, it does not usually help students understand ambiguity, negotiate meaning, or see different points of view in real-life situations. Byram (2021) contends that intercultural competence encompasses not merely knowledge of cultural practices but also the ability to interpret, relate, and critically assess cultural meanings (pp. 34–36). To develop intercultural competence, students need opportunities to engage with complexity, question their own beliefs, and reflect on what they mean. In this educational setting, texts that provide nuanced depictions of human experience are especially significant. Resources that depict culture as dynamic, contested, and internally diverse enable learners to transcend essentialized conceptions of national identity. They also create a space for important conversations about social norms, power dynamics, and how people build their identities. Liddicoat and Scarino (2023) assert that intercultural language teaching should regard culture as a dynamic process of meaning-making rather than as fixed content knowledge (pp. 17–19). Such materials significantly prompt learners to scrutinize both the target culture and their own interpretive frameworks. This self-reflective aspect is crucial to intercultural learning and fosters empathy and analytical insight. Additionally, interacting with genuine, contextually rich discourse exposes learners to language influenced by social relationships,

historical contexts, and ideological conflicts. Kramsch (2022) asserts that language inherently possesses symbolic significance and cultural memory, necessitating that learners discern meaning within expansive sociocultural contexts (pp. 41–44). When students examine the construction of meaning in intricate communicative contexts, they engage in interpretive strategies that transcend mere linguistic decoding. They learn to pay attention to tone, nuance, perspective, and implied meaning. In this context, specific types of discourse offer distinctive opportunities for integrating language development and intercultural learning.

English literature enables students to learn the language by negotiating meaning within the social context of the literature. In contrast to culture lessons that disregard the complexities of the social world and oversimplify customs and traditions, literature appreciates these complexities by depicting ambiguity, competing value systems, and a contested social order. Reading English short stories, poems, plays, and novels enables learners to experience culture as a system of interconnected perspectives rather than a collection of information. These perspectives are constructed through various literary and rhetorical elements, including voice, genre, relationships, conflict, irony, and symbolism. In the current language teaching literature, the relationship between language and culture is even more intertwined, as Kramsch (2022) describes. Literature highlights the relationship by purposely "slowing down the process of communication" (p. 41) so the reader can make interpretive choices.

In this sense, the use of English literature in teaching offers a solution to the problem of teaching a language functionally without culturally reducing the interactions. The culture embedded in literature is so complex that it cannot be simplified. For example, some characters may act inconsistently, some narrators may be unreliable, and the societal situation presented in the literature may be contrary to the reader's expectations. Thus, literature encourages readers to analyze and construct meanings, particularly in cultural contexts. It encourages learners to reflect on and consider what may be appropriate or normative in a given society (Byram, 2021, pp. 62–65). Therefore, the literature emphasizes the essential skill of cultural sensitivity required in interdisciplinary research. Literature's significant gift to intercultural learning is its ability to enable mediated encounters with otherness. Literature offers the chance to engage with other social worlds at a socially and emotionally safe distance. This is especially important given the emotional risks and uncertainties inherent in intercultural learning. Emerging work in intercultural pedagogy has focused on meaning as arising from the interaction between text and reader, shaped by the reader's social history, values, and position (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2023, pp. 88–91). The reader's active role is to create the culture present in a literary work. The teacher, as a cultural guide/facilitator, is to create a space that clarifies these interpretative frameworks by enabling students to reflect on what in

the text triggered specific evaluative responses and on the cultural background on which those responses were based.

From a theoretical perspective, Kramsch (2022) describes contemporary theory as relating the educational "third space" to the construction of symbolic and interpretive competencies. She states that when learners are prompted to consider the construction of meaning, they become aware of how language builds personas, positions speakers, and socially constructs realities. She describes such learning outcomes as resulting from comparison, interpretation, and reflexive dialogue (pp. 45–48). Notably, however, facilitation is never neutral. Text selection, focus on certain speaking and writing styles, and the legitimization of specific language varieties are all ideological. For example, in a transnational context, language teaching and learning must go beyond the nation-centered cultural representation and consider the global spread of English and the geographies of power it entails (Risager, 2021, pp. 73–75).

In professional literature, the use of tasks beyond fosters comprehension and accuracy. While summaries and vocabulary tasks aid linguistic development, more active intercultural learning requires learners to reflect on the social and pragmatic meanings of texts. For example, through literary dialogue, learners can study phenomena such as politeness, disagreement, and intimacy, as well as the roles of indirectness, names, and silence in these. Such analyses can be usefully extended to the study of cross-speech-act phenomena across languages and cultures, with particular attention to the roles of power, social distance, and situational constraints (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2023, pp. 101-104). The literature on language pedagogy indicates that when tasks are designed with precision, literature provides authentic language and cultural input (Lazar, 2019, pp. 58-61).

Through experience in literary reading, empathy is not inherently critical. Students may identify too much with the characters, leading to unexamined assumptions and unacknowledged bias. As a result, modern intercultural pedagogy focuses on fact-based interpretations. When students are asked to substantiate their interpretations with evidence from the text and to consider the limitations of the context, they are encouraged to think socioculturally rather than emotionally (Byram, 2021, pp. 92–95). These are consistent with an interpretive approach to intercultural learning, which emphasizes noticing, interpreting, relating, and reflecting.

The selection of texts is a cultural act in itself. A curriculum that is predominantly focused on a single genre, historical period, or national tradition is likely to reproduce a singular cultural center. A culturally sustaining literary curriculum encompasses a variety of genres and voices, including short stories, poetry, drama, novels, young adult literature, spoken-word poetry, and writing from diasporic communities. While canonical texts are often framed as uncritically authoritative, they can be treated as historically specific, whereas contemporary texts often resonate with learners' lived

experience. Teaching literature as perspective and not prescription allows learners to engage with language, culture, and their own meanings in an integrated way. (Gürses & Mede, 2021, pp. 214–216).

Given English's global reach, it makes excellent sense for English literature to examine multinational and multilingual identities. Literature from a postcolonial, multilingual context exemplifies how English can be both a conduit and a locus of power. The recent study of the interrelations of language, identity, and movement posits that one learns English and, at the same time, learns to manage the power of one's position and the recognition (or lack thereof) found within the language (Norton & De Costa, 2018, pp. 87–89). These literary narratives, by constructing symbolic resources for identity negotiations, show how the combination of dialect, register, and narrative voice can create the impression of belonging or socially marginalize someone.

About teaching literature in a culturally sensitive and ethically responsible way, there is an understanding that the text(s) in question may display elements of racism, sexism, and colonial thinking. A prior engagement with the literature that relies on avoiding these elements risks sanitizing cultural history, whereas an uncritical engagement with the text can legitimize and perpetuate harm. Current literature on teaching methodologies also promotes understanding of ethical and cultural critique, which combines the ability to evaluate representations, practices, and beliefs from perspectives of justice, dignity, and equity (Byram, 2021, pp. 118–120). The use of canonized literature alongside counter-narratives and other contemporary works is one way to help students understand that culture is contested.

Given that learning is developmental, assessing intercultural competencies is difficult. Existing models suggest that evaluators focus on processes rather than outcomes, such as learners' interpretive depth, situational/contextual awareness, disposition to modify beliefs, and ethical judgment (Deardorff, 2020, pp. 83–85). Reflective journals, literature-based portfolios, and discourse analyses have been found effective in documenting such processes and making intercultural growth and pedagogical accountability visible. At its core, using English literature as a cultural mediator assumes that intercultural learning requires an interpretive, reflective, and ethical engagement with otherness. Literature, in particular, aids this engagement by rendering the familiar strange and encouraging reflection on the process of meaning-making. When teachers select a range of diverse literature, present it as contextually embedded cultural artifacts, and support learners in evidence-based interpretation and reflection, literature becomes a powerful tool for intercultural pedagogy. In this way, English literature enables learners to develop their language skills, sustain their engagement, and prepare them to use English to transcend borders, rather than as a means of accessing a single, culturally insular world.

## INSTITUTIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF INTERCULTURAL TEACHING THROUGH LITERATURE

The pedagogical significance of incorporating literature into intercultural language instruction is well recognized; however, its execution cannot be comprehended in isolation from institutional contexts. National curricula, testing systems, teacher accountability measures, and policy priorities all affect what happens in classrooms and shape educational systems. Even when teachers know how important it is to teach students to be culturally aware through literature, they may not be able to do so due to systemic problems. The conflict between progressive teaching methods and institutional standards is especially clear in exam-driven settings, where quantifiable language results often take precedence over critical and interpretive engagement. Studies on language policy and curriculum reform consistently reveal that intercultural objectives are often articulated at the policy level yet inadequately implemented in practice. Scarino (2020) contends that while intercultural language learning is broadly supported in curriculum frameworks, assessment structures often emphasize isolated linguistic knowledge, consequently constraining classroom practices (pp. 4–6). When standardized tests primarily assess grammar, vocabulary, and reading comprehension without requiring students to think critically, teachers are indirectly encouraged to use test-oriented, transmissive methods. Consequently, literature, despite its capacity to foster reflective and dialogic learning, may be reduced to a mere tool for vocabulary enhancement or comprehension activities rather than for intercultural investigation. Institutional cultures also affect teachers' professional agency. In centralized education systems, strict rules about what students should learn and high-stakes tests can make people cautious, since straying from the set content can be seen as dangerous. This setting may dissuade experimentation with interpretive, discussion-oriented methodologies crucial for intercultural education. As a result, the effective incorporation of literature as a cultural facilitator relies on both teacher proficiency and systemic coherence among curricular objectives, evaluation methods, and institutional backing.

## INSTITUTIONAL CONSEQUENCES OF INTERCULTURAL INSTRUCTION VIA LITERATURE

In countries like Turkiye, where EFL systems are exam-based, the curriculum's structure makes it hard for teachers to focus on specific aspects in their classrooms. There has been some progress at the national level in English-language curricula toward recognizing intercultural aims and learner-centered approaches. However, the literature shows that these aims are not often put into practice. Upon examining EFL

curricula in Turkey, it seems that cultural elements are predominantly superficial, emphasizing informational knowledge over the encouragement of critical thinking regarding cross-cultural values, beliefs, or practices (Çelik, 2021, pp. 3450–3452). This pushes intercultural learning to the margins, making it harder for teachers to encourage critical thinking and conversation about culture.

In countries such as Turkiye, which have exam-focused EFL systems, curricular design significantly constrains what teachers can focus on in their classrooms. While there is some progress at the national level in English-language curricula toward recognizing intercultural aims and learner-centered approaches, the literature indicates that these aims are rarely implemented. In reviewing EFL curricula in Turkiye, it appears that cultural components are essentially shallow and focus on informational knowledge rather than on promoting critical thinking about cross-cultural values, beliefs, or practices (Çelik, 2021, pp. 3450–3452). This relegates intercultural learning to the periphery, thereby constraining teachers' ability to foster critical engagement and dialogue around culture.

The success of a curriculum framework also depends on how realistic its guidance is regarding the attainability of outcomes. For example, Bildik and Altun (2022) reported an 'implementation gap' in the Turkish ELT curriculum, undershooting the necessary instructional time, materials, and assessment alignment to support ambitious curricular goals (pp. 1201-1203). Here, teachers are often expected to bridge the gap between the curriculum and classroom realities, which can affect the uniformity and continuity of their pedagogical practice. This gap also places an additional burden on teachers, underscoring the need for systemic alignment between curriculum frameworks, assessments, and professional support.

The link between curriculum design and teacher education and training is invaluable. The research shows that intercultural teaching does not stem directly from curricular reform but instead from purposeful prep and ongoing professional education. If we look at research concerning Turkish EFL teachers, even though there are positive perceptions surrounding intercultural communicative competence, there exists a general lack of knowledge of how to implement the framework, and there is a lack of intercultural education in their pre-service teaching training (Kani & Yılmaztürk, 2021, pp. 883-885). Intercultural education, when offered, is typically a short course that focuses on a particular skill and does not engage the teacher in a deeper scholarly approach to the course content, the course, or the pedagogy.

Professional development that does not engage the teacher's identity is, for all intents and purposes, useless. The interventional frameworks, strategies, and means by which teachers become confident and competent in intercultural teaching are shaped by experiential, self, and institutional frameworks and training, as well as by the development of a new, positive self-image and professional identity. The research of Onursoy and Zaimoğlu (2024) indicates that this is primarily individualized and

intra-institutional (pg. 321-323). This strongly supports the case for more comprehensive, sustained professional development that makes intercultural mediation an institutional priority rather than a personal choice.

Ultimately, the impact of institutional barriers in exam-oriented systems is substantial on both educators' professional development and curriculum enactment. In Turkiye, high-stakes tests primarily assess students' knowledge of discrete linguistic items. This pushes teachers to adopt test-oriented approaches, teaching to the test, and covering content on the test. Teachers report that the evaluation criteria and time pressure imposed on them create barriers to implementing culturally responsive teaching, discussion, and reflective learning tasks aimed at deeper understanding (Aksoy, 2023, pp. 14–16). Therefore, the lack of intercultural objectives is not due to teacher inertia. Instead, it is the result of a system that steers educators to focus on teaching outcomes rather than on the processes students undergo.

What has been discussed so far indicates that, for intercultural understanding to be successfully integrated into language teaching objectives, there needs to be a cohesive systems approach that encompasses curriculum construction, teacher training, and a review of institutional-level assessment systems. In the absence of such a system, teachers' potential to deliver culturally and pedagogically expansive language teaching is curtailed by the gap between policy aspirations and assessment demands.

## CURRICULAR IMPLICATIONS OF INTERCULTURAL TEACHING THROUGH LITERATURE

Using literature to learn about other cultures requires more than just one teacher's effort; it needs a well-planned curriculum. Curriculum functions as a structural framework that establishes learning objectives, sequencing, assessment priorities, and pedagogical expectations. When intercultural competence is explicitly integrated into curricular objectives, it enables the creation of continuous developmental pathways instead of fragmented classroom activities. On the other hand, when curricula place greater emphasis on separate language goals, intercultural engagement may not be a priority. It may depend on the teacher's choice rather than on a commitment from the whole system. Modern curriculum theory is increasingly emphasizing competence-based models that integrate knowledge, skills, attitudes, and critical awareness. In the realm of language education, this transition aligns with intercultural communicative competence frameworks, which define learning as the enhancement of interpretive, relational, and reflective abilities rather than merely the acquisition of factual cultural information. Byram (2021) contends that intercultural education necessitates curricular integration through explicitly defined

objectives that encompass interpretative and relational skills, attitudes of openness and curiosity, and critical cultural awareness (pp. 37–39). Without such clear articulation in the curriculum, intercultural learning may be seen as an extra instead of a basic part of education. Additionally, the curriculum design affects how literature is taught. If literary texts are primarily regarded as tools for reading comprehension, their intercultural potential is limited. However, when curricula view literature as a space where people can make meaning, work out their identities, and represent themselves symbolically, studying literature can help people connect more deeply with others from other cultures. Curricular documents need to go beyond just listing themes and instead focus on interpretive processes, dialogic inquiry, and critical reflection as the main goals of learning. So, curricular policy is very important in deciding whether literature is just something to learn about or a way to help students develop their intercultural skills at all levels of education.

First, it is important to remember that the design of the curriculum is the main "gatekeeper" that determines whether intercultural teaching through literature can become a long-term learning experience or just a one-time enrichment activity. Recent policy-related frameworks continue to regard intercultural engagement as a composite of interpretive and mediational competencies, shifting away from viewing it as merely a 'context' or 'background' culture. The CEFR Companion Volume, for example, lists mediation and pluricultural engagement as important skills for the frameworks and gives examples of how to use them to improve teaching and learning outcomes (Council of Europe, 2020, pp. 90–91). When literature is treated as a cultural artifact in the curriculum, its goals can go beyond simply "covering" texts to include the defining interpretive work of students: seeing the vague, testing alternatives, and the culturally evidentially grounded.

First, it is important to note that curriculum design is the primary ‘gatekeeper` in determining whether intercultural teaching through literature can develop into an ongoing, sustained learning continuum or become a one-off enrichment activity. Recent policy-related frameworks continue to view intercultural engagement as an ensemble of interpretive and mediational skills, moving away from treating it as merely a ‘context’ or ‘background’ culture. The CEFR Companion Volume, for instance, positions mediation and pluricultural engagement as framework-relevant competencies and offers descriptors for these that can be used to develop teaching and learning outcomes in the frameworks (Council of Europe, 2020, pp. 90-91). When the curriculum positions literature as a cultural artifact, its aims can go beyond mere ‘coverage’ of texts to the defining interpretive work of learners: seeing the vague, testing alternatives, and the culturally evidentially grounded.

The most straightforward way to put intercultural objectives into practice in a literature-informed curriculum is to develop specific, assessable, language-sensitive, and level-appropriate outcomes. The CEFR Companion Volume is beneficial here, as it

presents specific scales for interaction with literature and other creative works. The descriptors for "Expressing a personal response to creative texts (including literature)" and "Analysis and criticism of creative texts (including literature)" help to formulate a pathway from an affective response to an interpretive response, to justification, and to critique (Council of Europe, 2020, pp. 105-106). From a curriculum perspective, this means a spiral design: students practice stating a personal response in simple language, then move on to provide elaborated responses supported by textual evidence. Finally, they critique and analyze the cultural, powerful rhetorical, and ideological aspects. (Council of Europe, 2020, pp. 105-107).

Additionally, intercultural curriculum design involves aligning objectives, learning activities, and assessments. If this alignment is absent, intercultural outcomes remain uncertain and can be easily replaced by linguistic targets that are easy to measure. Within curriculum scholarship on internationalizing curricula, it is similarly believed that, for the sake of intercultural development, specific learning outcomes, purposeful teaching strategies and pedagogies, and assessment across various teaching methods are needed to capture developmental growth rather than a one-off performance (Ji, 2020, pp. 14–16). When literature is the vehicle, aligned assessment can include reading logs (annotated), dialogic seminars, reflective commentary, and portfolio tasks that capture interpretive movement over time, rather than a one-off assessment that rewards the so-called "right" cultural reading.

In exam-focused systems such as those in Turkiye, institutional responsibilities appear to narrow the curriculum's intercultural range, even though educators value intercultural objectives. Research in Turkish education indicates that teachers' and students' perceptions of 'true' learning are influenced by high-stakes testing, leading them to focus instruction on test preparation and to disregard activities such as extended discussions, interpretive writing, and dialogic inquiry. For example, in one study on high-stakes testing and policy–assessment alignment, teachers reported that schooling increasingly becomes "education for tests," with classroom activities and student engagement structured around exam requirements (Aksoy, 2023, pp. 476–478). This has a predictable outcome for curriculum design. Literature-based intercultural pedagogy learning activities are often disadvantaged by slower lesson pacing, greater reliance on dialogue, and difficulty articulating clear learning objectives.

Additionally, curriculum changes in these contexts cannot simply add intercultural statements; they must also account for time, pacing, and assessment feedback. Teachers in Turkey perceive a gap between what the curriculum was intended to achieve and the reality of coverage, as well as between the materials and measurement-driven practices, which makes extended interpretive work unsustainable. From a curriculum standpoint, one implication is that the intercultural-through-literature goals require instructional time and task sequences that are defensible within existing timetable

constraints; otherwise, teachers are left to fill the gaps in systemic coherence as individual problem-solvers.

In addition, it is essential that teacher training and ongoing professional development be prioritized, as it is difficult to imagine a curriculum that expects intercultural mediation through literature without expecting teachers to facilitate sensitive conversations, support interpretive reasoning, and address disagreements ethically. However, teachers' practices indicate that intercultural communicative competence is interpreted, practiced, and operationalized in a piecemeal, isolated manner due to context-bound constraints and teachers' preparation (Onursoy & Zaimoğlu, 2024, pp. 321-323). Likewise, the literature on the teaching of culture through literature also highlights the "challenges of the teachers" (such as learner resistance, the teacher's uncertainty on how to deal with cultural conflicts, and the need to balance and reconcile multicultural perspectives carefully) as a primary or an essential condition for the realization of the teaching in the classroom (Baguia & Adder, 2020, pp. 4-6). Therefore, implementation plans for curricula should include ongoing professional development to facilitate discussion, culturally sensitive strategies for adapting texts, and the assessment of interpretive growth.

Similarly, the institutional barriers of exam-centered systems mean that professional development is effective only when intertwined with program-level supports. Teachers report that assessment practices and the mismatch between the curriculum and exams constrain what is pedagogically "safe" to do, particularly when students and parents focus on tests (Aksoy, 2023, pp. 476–478). A sensible outcome of the curriculum is that the ministries, schools, and units of the divisions must harmonize their assessment terminology for intercultural competences (i.e., evidence-based interpretation, perspective-taking, contextualization) so that teachers are not penalized for devoting classroom time to dialogue and reflection.

A well-structured curriculum for intercultural education through literature in Turkiye should integrate (a) explicit intercultural competencies outcome statements based on established frameworks, (b) literature-based task sequences that build interpersonally and intrapersonally constructive interpretive and mediator competencies, and (c) assessment strategies that capture and make evident the growth and development of learners. Employing the CEFR mediation and creative writing scales as a framework facilitates the shift of the "culture" construct from a non-specific goal to specific, actionable, and measurable components in classroom practice (Council of Europe, 2020, 90–91, 105–106). When curriculum, teacher development, and institutional evaluation systems are aligned, literature can occupy a central role not as something peripheral but as a well-organized area for students to engage in ethically responsible and interculturally sensitive interpretation.

Global curriculum examples demonstrate that literature is not an "extra" but a core component of the construction of interpretive, intercultural, and textual

competencies in language education. To begin with, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) Companion Volume positions language learning as meaning centered and provides expanded descriptors for the inclusion of literary (creative) texts for communicative proficiency, which in turn legitimizes classroom activities that provoke students to interpret tone, position, ambiguity, and perspective—the dimensions of literary reading (Council of Europe, 2020, pp. 57-60). Moreover, the Companion Volume's mediation perspective legitimizes the design of curricula in which learners "relay, "" explain, and "co-construct" meaning for different audiences and in different contexts. This can be done through literature circles, guided interpretive tasks, and multilingual thematic and narrative-voice comparisons (Council of Europe, 2020, pp. 103-107).

Furthermore, another source shows how IB literature integrates structure into its requirements. In this case, the guide for the Language B Diploma Programme mandates that students engaged at Higher Level have experience with two literary works, and further, constructs the purpose of the course to be the development of a student's language proficiency through the possibilities of texts, fostering an understanding of multiple cultures (International Baccalaureate Organization, 2020, p. 15). For example, with respect to "texts," the guide stipulates that they may comprise both "literary and non-literary written texts and extracts", thereby allowing a teacher to consider a poem, a short story, or an excerpt of a novel as a part of the curriculum rather than a supplement (International Baccalaureate Organization, 2020, p. 21). This design enables the following sequences: (1) thematic inquiry (e.g., identity and social organization), (2) literary reading for the purpose of exploring culture, and (3) comparative activities that integrate learners' local contexts with the discourses of the target language (International Baccalaureate Organization, 2020, pp. 21–22).

Identification of the College Board's integration of literary texts in the AP Spanish Language and Culture Course and Exam Description (2024) is justified. The Course and Exam Description positions the AP Spanish Language and Culture Course as a high school-to-university bridge curriculum, as does the AP Spanish Language and Culture Course Framework. The Course and Exam Description frames literary reading as a pathway to developing students' linguistic and cultural competency (p. 19). Similarly, the College Board recommends using authentic materials, particularly short stories, to develop vocabulary in context and interpretive skills. The College Board, therefore, advocates for the use of literature in teaching a second language (pp. 137–138).

The World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages, issued by ACTFL, also recognize the use of literature in language teaching. The World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages emphasize literature through the lens of high Interpretive Communication (the ability to make sense of what is read, listened to, or watched) and the "Connections" goal area, which prompts integration of knowledge

from various disciplines, most often through the use of literature and cultural texts (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 2015). Such a framework lends itself to literature-centered units, in which interpretive reading serves as the basis for interpersonal communication and presentational activities (e.g., retelling, critiquing, multimodal responses), thereby sustaining the cultural richness of the materials while also addressing the defined proficiency objectives.

## INTEGRATING INTERCULTURAL TEACHING WITH LITERATURE AT PROGRAMME AND POLICY LEVELS

Not only does the success of intercultural teaching through literature depend on how the classroom is taught or the curriculum is designed, but also on how well the program fits together and how well the policies align. Research on educational reform consistently shows that long-lasting change needs support from all levels of the system. When intercultural goals are built into national standards, teacher training programs, and assessment frameworks, they are more likely to become part of everyday life rather than just goals. Without this kind of alignment, even well-planned curricular projects could be broken up or implemented only partially. Language education policy has progressively shifted towards multilingual and pluricultural frameworks that acknowledge learners as socially embedded individuals possessing varied linguistic repertoires. The CEFR Companion Volume from the Council of Europe (2020) says that plurilingual and pluricultural competence are very important for language education. It lists mediation, collaboration, and intercultural dialogue as the most important skills (pp. 28–30). This change in policy shows that more people are realizing that teaching language helps people communicate better, participate in democracy, and build social cohesion. Intercultural engagement cannot be limited to discrete literary components or voluntary classroom dialogues; it must be integral to program objectives and accountability frameworks. Also, program-level integration helps teachers have more control by spreading responsibility among all those involved in the institution. Teacher educators, textbook creators, school administrators, and test designers are all very important in making sure that intercultural teaching can thrive. When institutional frameworks prioritize quantifiable linguistic outcomes and marginalize interpretive and dialogic learning, educators may encounter conflicting expectations. On the other hand, when intercultural goals are officially recognized and supported, literature can be a real and important part of language programs.

Intercultural teaching through literature works best when it is viewed as a shared institutional responsibility rather than an individual teacher's "add-on." Recent work in language policy views schools as sites of integration and considers language

education a means of fostering social inclusion and equity by drawing on learners' diverse repertoires. This view positions policy makers, curricular developers, teacher trainers, and assessment developers, rather than only classroom teachers (Coste & Cavalli, 2015, pp. 6–7). Peripheral \(and\) '\enrichment'\ intercultural aims leave teachers to deal with cultural tensions and the literary meanings in silos. If policy and programme frameworks incorporate intercultural components, the work is systematic and distributive, and it is possible to evaluate the outcome(s).

Moreover, curriculum frameworks may incorporate and legitimize intercultural learning by specifying learning outcomes that include mediation and the construction of pluricultural meaning, as well as language competencies. This is further supported by the CEFR Companion Volume (Council of Europe, 2020), which describes mediation as a key educational communication process that involves facilitating understanding, managing interaction, and constructing meaning at different levels (pp. 33–35). If national or institutional curricula articulate such descriptors in literature-related outcomes as "students mediate different viewpoints in a story by summarizing, reframing, and relating perspectives for different audiences,"\ teachers receive a curriculum-imposed jurisdiction instead of acting on their agency.

Additionally, programme-level design can facilitate literature-based intercultural initiatives by considering the alignment of resources, time, and assessment. Constructing a spiral curriculum, for example, enables programme teams to support students in interculturally navigating (i.e., perspectives and ethical representation) and progressing through different literary genres of increasing difficulty. Such curriculum coherence is further magnified when planners (of curriculum, tasks, and assessment) understand these tools as part of a single system. This is especially encouraged in the literature regarding the CEFR (North & Piccardo, 2019, pp. 14-15).

Also, systematizing teacher education and professional development as ongoing rather than episodic activities is critical. One illustration is the use of structured dialogic routines—such as story sharing and guided debriefing—to create safe environments in which teachers and students can engage in intercultural reflection and empathy. As Deardorff's Story Circles manual indicates, developing intercultural competence requires more than isolated activities; instead, it requires intentional design and sustained interactions (Deardorff, 2020, pp. 20-21). Such routines can be woven into literature methods courses for pre-service teachers and into learning communities for in-service teachers within the programme, thereby building shared facilitation language, ethical discussion templates, and reflective practices among teachers.

Policy instruments can solidify implementation by addressing structural barriers related to workload, assessment pressure, and teacher readiness. In the EU Council Recommendation, teacher gaps in preparation, as noted, are linked to education and intercultural competence, and it emphasizes the need to support and strengthen

teachers' capacity to address and engage with diverse groups of learners (Council of the European Union, 2018, p. 1). In such systems, policy support is essential because it defends the right to assessment variety (e.g., portfolios, interpretive commentaries, dialogues, tasks) and protects instructional time for discussion-rich literature.

For the intercultural teaching of literature to become a reality, it is essential at the levels of programmes and policy to jointly (a) articulate intercultural/mediation goals, (b) integrate curriculum, assessment, and materials, and (c) embed teacher education in relational, collaborative, and identity work. Thus, teachers become more than "responsible persons" but rather integrated cultural mediators within a purposeful educational system (Coste & Cavalli, 2015, pp. 6–7; Council of Europe, 2020, pp. 33–35).

## CONCLUSION

The chapter discussed the role of English literature teachers in Turkiye as cultural facilitators at the intersection of culture, language, literature, identity, and the system's boundaries. It also stated that teaching intercultural communicative competence (ICC) as a curriculum goal will remain an intention unless it is brought into being and actualized through teachers' interpretive, dialogic, and pedagogical practices. In exam-oriented EFL systems such as those in Turkiye, these demands become more complex, as teachers must address the linguistic, intercultural, and ethical dimensions of teaching. Recent studies suggest that such integration is rarely recognized within the system and is grounded in teachers' personal investment, professional autonomy, and identity construction (Onursoy & Zaimoğlu, 2024, pp. 321–323).

A central contribution of this chapter has been to conceptualize cultural facilitation as an identity-oriented professional role rather than a methodological add-on. Contemporary research on teacher identity indicates that when teachers assume intercultural responsibilities, they undergo substantial transformations in their professional self-concept, often involving emotional labor, role strain, and ambiguity (Phothongsunan, 2025, pp. 270–275). These findings pertain to extant work on language teacher identity, which conceptualizes identity as dynamic, socially constructed, and shaped by experience, reflection, and surrounding structures (Pishghadam et al., 2022, pp. 3–5). Supporting teachers in this transformation means designing professional development opportunities that center identity, reflexivity, and ethically informed positioning, rather than a narrow focus on techniques.

This chapter recognizes English literature as a means for cultural integration. As a cultural and ideological artifact, literature, unlike a mere language lesson, allows students to grapple with ambiguity and multiple value systems, which is essential for ICC. Literature, it appears, is not sufficiently recognized for its intercultural value in

many Turkish EFL settings, primarily due to curricular and evaluative constraints, even though it is valued by most instructors (Er & Çiftci Aksoy, 2023, pp. 89–91; Çatalbaş & Solmaz, 2024, pp. 34–36). This highlights a discrepancy that calls for greater institutional justification, prioritizing intercultural value in a given unit's outcomes, and adequate curricular, evaluative, and professional leeway for teachers.

The chapter emphasizes that systemic issues, particularly the prevalence of high-stakes assessments, continue to restrict the scope of language education toward greater interculturalism. When research shows that the culture-oriented tasks teachers most often engage in are, in fact, cultural, this is not apathy. Instead, it is an attempt to respond to prevailing institutional demands that are primarily outcome-oriented in language (Aksoy, 2023, pp. 14–16). To address this gap, the interconnection of curriculum, pedagogy, evaluation, and professional development within a unified intercultural framework is needed.

In conclusion, the shift of English literature teachers into the role of cultural facilitators requires a rethinking of the ethical, interpretive, and identity-constituting nature of language teaching. To justify this role, there needs to be systemic alignment with intercultural education, identity-based professional development of a particular duration, and curricula that accord literature a primary role in intercultural education. It is this type of alignment that will enable English language teaching in Turkiye to move beyond an examination-based focus and foster reflective, responsible, and interculturally competent learners.

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